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ABSTRACT

Since grandparents can have profound influence on their grandchildren's upbringing, understanding how grandparents present models of male and female roles may enhance understanding of early sex-role socialization. Sex differences in perceptions of grandparenting were examined in a group of grandmothers (N=177) and grandfathers (N=105) who completed a mailed questionnaire. The questionnaires yielded scores for grandparenting satisfaction and perceived responsibility for grandchildren's discipline and care, for helping grandchildren, and for giving childrearing advice. Results indicated sex differences in several grandparent characteristics. Grandmothers and grandfathers differed in demographic characteristics, and family and individual characteristics contributed to grandfathers' but not to grandmothers' satisfaction with grandparenting. Grandmothers' satisfaction scores significantly exceeded those of grandfathers, and grandfathers' scores for perceived responsibilities for grandchildren's care and for giving childrearing advice significantly exceeded those of grandmothers. Grandparents' self-descriptions implied models of distinct male and female attitudes, with grandfathers rather than grandmothers endorsing relatively high levels of responsibility for taking care of grandchildren and for giving childrearing advice. This finding suggests that grandparents may present nontraditional sex-role models. (NRB)

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SEX DIFFERENCES

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SATISFACTION AND PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITIES OF GRANDPARENTS

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Abstract

This paper describes sex differences in grandparenting satisfaction, perceived responsibilities in grandchildren's upbringing, and predictors of grandparenting satisfaction. Grandmothers (n=177) and grandfathers (n=105) completed questionnaires yielding scores for grandparenting satisfaction, perceived responsibility for grandchildren's discipline, perceived responsibility for grandchildren's care, perceived responsibility for helping grandchildren, and perceived responsibility for giving childrearing advice. Grandmothers' satisfaction scores significantly exceeded those of grandfathers, and grandfathers' scores for perceived responsibilities for grandchildren's care and for giving childrearing advice significantly exceeded those of grandmothers. In addition, different variables predicted men's and women's grandparenting satisfaction scores. It was concluded that women and men differ as much in constellations of attitudes toward grandparenting as in individual attitudes; discussion focuses upon possible sources of these sex differences, and upon possible consequences of these differences for early sex-role socialization and for further research.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN SATISFACTION AND PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITIES OF GRANDPARENTS

Social scientists have extensively researched differences in male and female roles within the nuclear family (for reviews, see Maccoby, 1974; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). However, there has been much less study of sex differences in the behavior of extended family members. There has, in particular, been little empirical consideration of similarities and differences between grandmothers and grandfathers.

The importance of considering sex differences in grandparenting is partially demonstrated by demographic statistics. During the twentieth century, the elderly have represented a growing minority of the population, and this trend is expected to continue throughout the remainder of the century (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1981); for this reason, adequate understanding of the experiences of the aged is crucial. Several gerontologists have suggested that family relationships become increasingly important in later life, as other sources of social involvement are lost (i.e., Troll, Miller, & Atchley, 1979); awareness of the family experiences of the aged is thus particularly important. Furthermore, recent surveys inform us that most older Americans are grandparents, and that most grandparents are in frequent contact with grandchildren (Harris & Associates, 1975). Grandparents, then, can potentially have profound influences upon their grandchildren's upbringing; understanding of ways in which

grandparents do or do not present models of distinct male and female roles should enhance understanding of early sex-role socialization. This paper describes the findings of a recent study in which a primary goal was the identification of sex differences in perceptions of grandparenting.

Empirical discussions of sex differences in grandparenting have described grandparents' caretaking involvement, styles of relationships with grandchildren, and personal role meaning. Albrecht (1954), in an early study of grandparents as caretakers, found that grandmothers took care of grandchildren more than did grandfathers, regardless of grandfathers' retirement status. Neugarten & Weinstein (1964) reported that only grandmothers acted as surrogate parents for grandchildren, while only grandfathers acted as teachers or resource persons for grandchildren. Furthermore, these investigators noted that grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to find a sense of biological renewal in grandparenting; grandfathers, in contrast, were more likely than grandmothers to view grandparenting as an opportunity for emotional fulfillment. More recently, Crawford (1981) identified sex differences in perceptions of grandparenting using a conceptual scheme similar to that of Neugarten & Weinstein (1964); again, women viewed grandparenting as a source of biological renewal, while men felt that grandparenting was important as an opportunity to share information or financial resources with grandchildren or to take pride in grandchildren's accomplishments.

At this time, then, research documents sex differences in relatively global characteristics of grandparenting experience. The purpose of the research reported in this paper was to identify sex differences in

more precisely delineated perceptions. The specific objectives were to (1) compare grandmothers' and grandfathers' levels of satisfaction with grandparenting and levels of perceived responsibilities in grandchildren's upbringing, and (2) examine relationships among characteristics of grandparents' families (e.g., number, age, and proximity of grandchildren), grandparents' characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, retirement status) and perceptions of grandparenting for grandmothers and grandfathers.

METHOD

Participants

Grandmothers (n=177) and grandfathers (n=105) participated in the study. The mean age was 68.2 years, with an age range from 45 to 90. Most grandparents were married (63%), had completed some high school (56%), and were retired (67%). Most grandparents (66%) were working or had worked in white collar occupations, and the modal (33%) annual household incomes was ten to twenty thousand dollars. Table 1 summarizes grandparents' demographic background.

Insert Table 1 about here

Grandparents' had an average of 3 children and an average of 6 grandchildren. Sixty-three percent of the grandparents had at least one grandchild living within 30 minutes travel, while only thirteen percent had grandchildren living no closer than four hours travel. Characteristics of grandparents' families are also summarized in Table 1.

Procedures

Perceptions of grandparenting were assessed using mail questionnaires. The author contacted grandparents during meetings of church and civic organizations in Racine and Kenosha, Wi. At each meeting, the author explained the purpose of the research, the nature of the questionnaire, and procedures for completing and returning questionnaires. One week after each meeting, postcards were sent to each grandparent receiving a questionnaire; the postcards thanked grandparents who had already returned questionnaires and urged those who had not to do so promptly. Of the 330 grandparents receiving questionnaires, 86% (n=282) returned completed questionnaires.

The questionnaire comprised 68 items in a Likert scale format. Each item was made up of a statement describing grandparenting experience (these statements were drawn from transcripts of semi-structured interviews with grandparents conducted as part of an earlier study); grandparents indicated their agreement or disagreement with each statement. Items were divided among six subscales: (1) satisfaction with grandparenting (15 items, Chronbach's alpha = .79), (3) perceived responsibility for grandchildren's discipline (16 items, Chronbach's alpha = .84), (4) perceived responsibility for grandchildren's care (3 items, Chronbach's alpha = .55), (5) perceived responsibility for giving childrearing advice (13 items, Chronbach's alpha = .90), (5) perceived responsibility for helping grandchildren (4 items, Chonbach's alpha = .70), and (6) perceived control

over the nature of relationships with grandchildren (17 items, Chronbach's alpha = .37)N.

FINDINGS

Sex Differences in Demographic Characteristics

There were sex differences in several demographic characteristics (see Table 1). Grandmothers were more likely to be separated or divorced than were grandfathers, Chi-square (2) = 43.76, $p < .001$, $C = .37$, and were less likely to have completed bachelor's or master's degrees than were grandfathers, Chi-square (5) = 16.74, $p < .005$, $C = .24$. Grandmothers were also less likely to be working outside the home and more likely to be full-time homemakers, semi-retired, or working part time than were grandfathers, Chi-square (6) = 26.76, $p < .0002$, $C = .31$; and were less likely to be employed or have been employed in blue collar, service, or agricultural fields than were grandfathers, Chi-square (4) = 45.45, $p < .0001$, $C = .37$. Furthermore, the mean ages of the oldest grandchild, t (266) = 3.01, $p < .003$, and of the youngest grandchild, t (266) = 3.40, $p < .001$, were significantly higher for grandmothers.

Sex Differences in Perceptions of Grandparenting

t-tests were used to compare grandmothers' and grandfathers' mean scores for satisfaction with grandparenting and for each of the perceived responsibilities in grandchildren's upbringing; Table 2 presents mean scale scores. Grandmothers' mean satisfaction with grandparenting scores significantly exceeded those of grandfathers, t (278) = 3.07, $p < .002$, while grandfathers' mean scores for perceived responsibility for grand-

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NBecause of low reliability, scores for perceived control over the nature of relationships with grandchildren were not included in data analysis.

children's care, t (279) = 3.14, $p < .002$, and for perceived responsibility for giving childrearing advice, t (279) = 4.32, $p < .0001$, significantly exceeded those of grandmothers. There were no significant sex differences in perceived responsibilities for grandchildren's discipline or in perceived responsibility for helping grandchildren (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Sex Differences in Predictors of Grandparenting Satisfaction

Separate multiple regression analyses were performed for grandmothers and grandfathers. Grandparenting satisfaction was the dependent variable and characteristics of grandparents' families (grandchildren's age, number, and proximity), grandparent characteristics (age, marital and recirement statuses), and perceived responsibility scores were evaluated as predictors. Table 3 summarizes these analyses.

Insert Table 3 about here

For grandmothers, these variables significantly predicted grandparenting satisfaction, multiple R = .51, R^2 = .26, $p < .01$; two variables were significant predictors (see Table 3). When the effects of the characteristics of grandparents' families and of grandparents themselves were statistically controlled through prior entry into the regression equation, grandmothers with relatively high levels of perceived responsibility for helping grandchildren and relatively high levels of perceived responsibility for grand-

children's care were likely to have relatively high levels of satisfaction with grandparenting.

The predictors evaluated also significantly predicted grandfathers' satisfaction, multiple R = .61, R^2 = .37, $p < .01$; four variables were significant predictors (see Table 3). When the effects of the remaining predictors were controlled through prior entry into the regression equation, grandfathers who had relatively young grandchildren, who were themselves relatively old, and who had high levels of perceived responsibilities for grandchildren's care and for helping grandchildren were likely to have relatively high grandparenting satisfaction scores.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified sex differences in several grandparent characteristics. First, grandmothers and grandfathers differed in demographic characteristics. Second, men and women differed in levels of grandparenting satisfaction and of perceived responsibilities for grandchildren's care and for giving childrearing advice. Finally, family and individual characteristics contributed to men's, but not to women's, satisfaction with grandparenting.

Of these differences, those in grandparenting scale scores and in predictors of grandparenting satisfaction are the most intriguing. Grandmothers' higher satisfaction scores may reflect both earlier and current family experiences. Assuming that these contemporary grandmothers had been their own children's primary caregivers, the women can be described as more familiar than the grandfathers with intimate adult-child family relationships. Perhaps greater familiarity, then, yields greater satisfaction with the relationships. Furthermore, the grandmothers in this

study had older grandchildren than did the grandfathers. Although some grandparents voice a special enjoyment of very young grandchildren, many others derive particular pleasure from relationships with older grandchildren, as conversation and recreation rather than caretaking increasingly dominate grandparent-grandchild interaction (Thomas & Datan, 1982; 1983).

Grandfathers' higher levels of perceived responsibility for grandchildren's care and for giving childrearing advice may reflect both normal male personality development and these grandfathers' family context. Psychologists have suggested (Gutmann, 1977; Livson, 1981) that men at mid-life optimally experience increased nurturance, expressivity, and capacity for intimacy. One way in which these qualities might be expressed is through relationships with grandchildren: taking care of grandchildren and advising about their upbringing provide opportunities for a middle aged or older man to be nurturant and to develop and express intimacy. In addition, the grandfathers in this study had younger grandchildren than did the grandmothers: perhaps, then, grandfathers encountered more situations in which caretaking and/or advising were called for.

The sex difference in predictors of satisfaction with grandparenting is explained in a similar manner. Recall that grandparent age and age of the youngest grandchild contributed to satisfaction for grandfathers, but not for grandmothers; specifically, men who were themselves relatively old and who had relatively young grandchildren (and who expressed high levels of perceived responsibility for grandchildren's care and for helping grandchildren) were likely to be highest in grandparenting satisfaction. Grandfathers who were themselves relatively old would be most likely to have experienced increased nurturance and expressivity; those who

further had relatively young grandchildren would be most likely to find opportunities to express these capacities. In essence, it is proposed that grandfathers' satisfaction with grandparenting may stem from having an opportunity to do what comes naturally, at this point in individual development.

In closing, two implications of the findings are relevant. First, the grandparents' self-descriptions implied models of distinct male and female attitudes and views of appropriate behavior; these models, however, were nontraditional, as it was grandfathers rather than grandmothers who endorsed relatively high levels of responsibilities for taking care of grandchildren and for giving childrearing advice. Further study of grandparents as agents of early sex-role socialization is essential: grandparents may be unrecognized nontraditional sex-role models. Projects in which grandchildren's and parents' views of differences between grandmothers' and grandfathers' family roles would complement the findings of this study.

A second implication is that additional research on grandfathering is needed. This study suggests that grandfather-grandchild relationships may provide an important context for mid- and later-life personal development; this issue could be especially well explored using longitudinal and/or qualitative data. It is also important to learn more about the correspondence or lack of correspondence between grandfathers' perceived responsibilities toward grandchildren and their actual behavior toward grandchildren: the findings of this research suggest a contradiction of earlier reports that grandfathers have relatively little involvement in grandchildren's

caretaking. With these sorts of information, a more satisfactory understanding of sex differences in grandparenting should be possible.

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Table 1
Grandparents' Demographic and Family Characteristics

	Grandmothers n=177	Grandfathers n=105
Mean Age	68.4 (7.7)	67.9 (8.6)
Marital Status		
Married	85	92
Separated or divorced	15	4
Widowed	75	9
Highest Level of Education		
Grade school	16	13
Some high school	35	8
High school degree	50	32
Some college	20	17
College degree	38	17
Master's degree	11	18
Retirement Status		
Working full time outside home	7	20
Full time homemaker	42	0
Working part time outside home	14	10
Retired	111	75
Occupation/Former occupation		
White collar	116	68
Blue collar	15	32
Service	14	1
Agricultural	1	4
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	50	9
$10,001 - 20,000	61	34
$20,001 - 30,000	19	29
Over $30,001	13	21
Mean Number of Grandchildren	5.7 (4.6)	5.6 (4.4)
Mean Age of Oldest Grandchild	17.9 (8.6)	14.6 (8.6)
Mean Age of Youngest Grandchild	8.0 (6.4)	5.5 (5.1)
Proximity of Geographically Closest Grandchild		
Less than 30 minutes travel	107	63
31 to 60 minutes travel	12	7
1 to 2 hours travel	20	11
2 to 4 hours travel	6	6
More than 4 hours travel	25	12

Note: Standard deviations corresponding to mean values appear in parentheses.

Table 2

Mean Scale Scores for Grandmothers and Grandfathers

	Grandmothers n=177	Grandfathers n=105
Satisfaction with Grandparenting[1]	55.02 (7.15)	52.28 (7.38)
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Discipline	50.05 (8.94)	51.56 (8.89)
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Care[1]	6.11 (1.83)	6.90 (2.34)
Perceived Responsibility for Giving Childrearing Advice[1]	34.09 (8.59)	38.61 (8.29)
Perceived Responsibility for Helping Grandchildren	16.22 (2.14)	16.08 (2.13)

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses

[1]Difference between means significant, $p < .002$

Table 3
Predictors of Grandparenting Satisfaction for Grandmothers and Grandfathers

Grandmothers
n=158

Variable	Multiple R	R^2	Simple r	Beta
Age youngest grandchild	.07	.004	.07	-.05
Age oldest grandchild	.07	.005	.06	.004
Proximity closest grandchild	.08	.006	.03	.06
Number of grandchildren	.08	.007	-.01	-.04
Grandparent age	.18	.033	.17	.14
Marital Status	.19	.036	-.01	-.06
Retirement Status	.19	.037	.08	.08
Perceived Responsibility for Helping Grandchildren[1]	.45	.204	.41	.44
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Care[1]	.50	.247	.17	.24
Perceived Responsibility for Giving Childrearing Advice	.51	.255	-.02	-.10
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Discipline	.51	.255	.031	-.02

Grandfathers
n=93

Variable	Multiple R	R^2	Simple r	Beta
Age Oldest Grandchild[1]	.15	.022	-.15	-.43
Age Youngest Grandchild	.21	.042	.03	-.05
Number of Grandchildren	.24	.058	-.09	.02
Proximity of Closest Grandchild	.25	.062	.06	-.02
Retirement Status	.29	.081	.07	-.01
Grandfather Age[1]	.29	.083	.02	.45
Marital Status	.29	.085	-.03	.01
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Care[1]	.53	.273	.43	.49
Perceived Responsibility for Helping Grandchildren[1]	.61	.371	.30	.33
Perceived Responsibility for Grandchildren's Discipline	.61	.373	.24	-.07
Perceived Responsibility for Giving Childrearing Advice	.61	.374	.25	.05

[1]Variable significantly contributes to prediction, $p < .01$.